

Take a ride on a road from the past

One-Tank Trip /National Road

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BLAINE, Ohio—The Blaine Hill Bridge is a monument to Ohio's past.

The 385-foot, brick-paved bridge in Belmont County is also a surviving link to the historical National Road. Dating to 1828, it is the oldest surviving bridge in the Buckeye state and was designated Ohio's Bicentennial Bridge in 2003.

With its three arches and sandstone blocks, it once carried travelers on the National Road over Wheeling Creek, taking traffic west onto the Big Hill with its 20 dangerous curves. It is the longest S-shaped bridge in Ohio. Today, vehicles are banned from the bridge, which lies in the shadow of the 1932-1933 bridge of steel and concrete that carries U. S. 40 over Wheeling Creek.

Bridges such as the Blaine Hill Bridge used to be common on the National Road in eastern Ohio—it was easier for engineers to build bridges that were at 90-degree angles to the streams. Curved ramps were then added at both ends, creating shallow S-shaped approaches.

Today, the Blaine Hill Bridge is one of the biggest Ohio attractions along the National Road, which some call America's Main Street.

The National Road ran 620 miles through six states, from Maryland to Illinois. First envisioned by George Washington, it was the only land link between the East Coast and America's western frontier in the early 19th century. It was America's first federally funded interstate highway, and it was the busiest road in the United States by the 1840s.

Today, the National Road offers step-back-in-time charm with sleepy pike towns, sections of old road, taverns, inns, cemeteries and more. It runs parallel to U. S. 40 and is a federally designated All-American Road, one of 31. That 700-mile designation stretches from Baltimore to East St. Louis, Ill.

Sites in Ohio include the boyhood home of astronaut John Glenn in New Concord, the Camp Chase Confederate cemetery and the first Wendy's restaurant in Columbus, and the Red Brick Tavern in Lafayette, which has served six U. S. presidents.

You will also find the National Road/Zane Grey Museum at Norwich, between Cambridge and Zanesville. Exhibits include a 136-foot-long diorama of the National Road; it also honors writer

Zane Grey (1872-1939), who hailed from nearby Zanesville and is known for his Western novels. The museum also spotlights art pottery from the area.

In Pennsylvania, the National Road runs next to the Fort Necessity National Battlefield from the French and Indian War. In West Virginia, sites include the West Virginia Independence Hall and Museum. In Illinois, travelers will find the prehistoric Cahokia Indian mounds.

The National Road is known for its distinctive milestones, which stood at one-mile intervals along the highway. Originally, about three feet of the exposed concrete stood above the ground. Each marker indicated the distance to Cumberland, Md., at the top center, and the name of the nearest towns to the east and west. The mile distances were carved on the sides.

The first markers of concrete weathered poorly and were replaced by sandstone in the 1850s. Concrete was used later to replace weathered milestones. Historians have identified 83 original markers still standing in Ohio, mostly in eastern counties.

In Ohio, the National Road stretches 228 miles from Bridgeport in the east on the Ohio River through Cambridge, Columbus and Springfield to the Indiana state line. It was used in the early days by settlers heading west in Conestoga wagons. Later, it was used by motorists driving cars.

Today, the National Road in Ohio is almost completely intertwined with U. S. 40, built in the 1920s, and runs parallel to Interstate 70, built in the 1960s.

200 years old

The National Road was authorized in 1806 by Congress. Construction began in Cumberland, Md., in 1811. It reached the Ohio River at Wheeling in 1818. Debate over the constitutionality of internal improvements delayed the road's extension for several years.

In 1825, ground was broken in Ohio, with the National Road reaching Zanesville in 1830, Columbus in 1833 and Springfield in 1838. It stretches west to Vandalia, Ill., where money ran out.

Small towns along the National Road boomed as thousands of travelers headed west over the Allegheny Mountains to settle in Ohio and beyond. The most common vehicles were stagecoaches, which covered 60 to 70 miles per day, and the colorful Conestoga wagons pulled by teams of six horses, which averaged 15 miles a day.

Small towns along the road contained taverns, blacksmith shops and livery stables. There was one tavern for every mile of the National Road, according to some estimates. So-called stagecoach taverns were more expensive, catering to affluent travelers. (The Mount Washington Tavern from 1828 in southwest Pennsylvania is still standing.) Wagon stands were cheaper, more like modern truck stops.

In eastern Guernsey County, you can drive across one of the S-shaped bridges on the National Road. The Salt Fork Bridge from 1828 lies east of Old Washington at Bridgewater and Blend

roads; it is one of two S-shaped bridges in Guernsey County and is a National Historic Landmark. Nearby is the Creighton House at Elizabethtown, one of the few surviving wagon and drover stands.

Drovers bought cattle, sheep or hogs from farmers and drove them on foot to Eastern markets. At night, they led the livestock into drove-lots to be fed. The space was shared with teamsters driving freight in Conestoga wagons. The drovers typically paid farmers a few cents a pound for hogs and cattle and \$1 or \$2 for fat sheep. They would drive 200 animals at a time.

Outside St. Clairsville, you will find the remains of the Brick Tavern. It featured a two-story porch and a large wooden awning or stand to shelter wagons. Plans call for its restoration. Next door is the Great Western Schoolhouse, a one-room structure from 1870 owned by Ohio University.

Tollhouses appeared on the National Road from 1835 to 1910. That's because federal funds for maintaining the road dried up, and the states switched to tolls. They typically stood about 20 miles apart.

Ohio's 50-page "Traveler's Guide to the Historic National Road in Ohio" outlines historical, cultural and recreational attractions along the road. The free guide was written by Glenn Harper of the Ohio Historical Society and Doug Smith, an auctioneer and a township trustee in Licking County. To get a copy, call the Ohio Historical Society at (614) 297-2300, (800) 686-6124 or (614) 298-2000, or download a copy from the Ohio National Road Association at www.ohionationalroad.org.

Guernsey County offers a pamphlet describing its 25-stop National Road/U. S. 40 driving tour. Contact the Cambridge/ Guernsey County Visitors & Convention Bureau by phone at (800) 933-5480 or online at www.visitguernseycounty.com.

For more National Road information:

- Pennsylvania: (724) 437-9877, www.nationalroadpa.org.
- Maryland: (410) 489-9100, <http://byways.org/explore/byways/2273>.
- West Virginia: (740) 695-2250, <http://byways.org/explore/byways/2478>.
- Indiana: www.indiananationalroad.org.
- Illinois: www.nationalroad.org.